



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

19th District News

Winter 2000



Representative Brian Hatfield

Olympia address:
415 Legislative Bldg
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7806

**Committees
and Leadership:**
Co-chair, Financial
Institutions & Insurance
Member, Transportation
Chair, Coastal Caucus



Representative Mark Doumit

Olympia address:
309 John L. O'Brien Bldg
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7870

**Committees
and Leadership:**
Vice Chair,
Appropriations
Vice Chair,
Local Government
Member,
Natural Resources

Toll-free Legislative Hotline:
1-800-562-6000

TDD (for hearing impaired):
1-800-635-9993

Dear Friends:

It's hard to believe we've already convened the first legislative session of the 2000s!

A number of important issues await us. Probably everyone in North America — at least in our Northwest region of it — knows all about Initiative 695 and the serious changes in government called for in the initiative. Whether you voted for it or not, there's no getting around the fact that a big majority of Washington citizens did support it — **and the Legislature must not use any other existing state law as an excuse for avoiding our responsibility.**

This edition of **19th District News** looks at the impact of the initiative. We want to review some of the most significant parts of state programs and services that are in for changes. And we also want to talk about other issues, too. **Although the initiative will surely continue grabbing the lion's share of attention, additional items are waiting on our legislative-debate table:**

- **Personal privacy.** There's a lot of discussion these days regarding how much information about you — if any — companies should be able to share. We need to take a mighty close look at this subject.
- **Gov't.-streamlining.** This is especially important in the wake of Initiative 695. Washington's citizens and businesses shouldn't have to put up with a confounding bureaucracy that fights them at every possible turn.
- **Retraining assistance.** We'll keep fighting hard to bring back Washington's popular Timber Retraining Benefits program. In the last legislative session, unfortunately, this program was allowed to expire.

These aren't the only issues, of course, and our report today examines other concerns. As always, thanks so much for your time. **Please don't ever hesitate to get in touch with us whenever you have your own ideas and thoughts.**

Best wishes,

Brian Hatfield
State Representative
19th Legislative District

Mark Doumit
State Representative
19th Legislative District

◆ Initiative 695:

Answering the demand for more accountable government

Initiative 695 puts everything else on the back burner, that's for sure! Our state has major, major issues demanding attention. And yet, all of a sudden, everything else is secondary to the initiative — secondary at best.

But it's our duty as legislators to implement this will of the people. No doubt about that.

In meeting our responsibility to put the provisions of I-695 into effect, we must still meet our duty to public health and safety, and our commitment to education.

As you know, the initiative replaces the motor-vehicle excise tax with a flat license-tab fee starting at \$30 a year. This new law also requires a vote of the people on any new tax proposals.

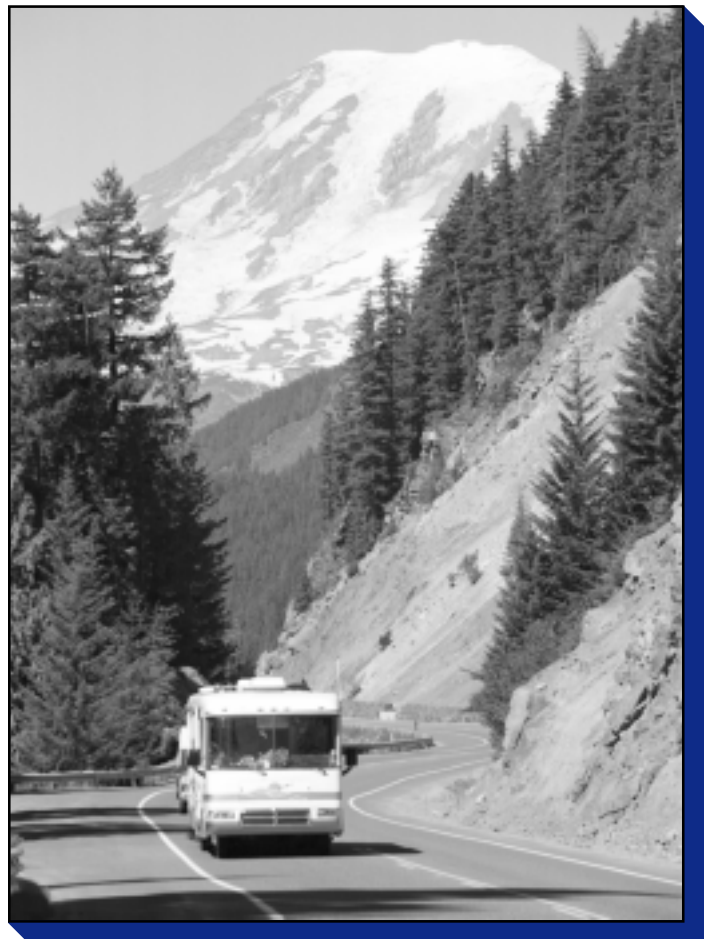
What's it mean for our state?

So, what does this all mean for road and highway projects at the city, county and state levels? What does it mean for transit systems, for police and fire departments, for public-health inspections, and for other activities that many people have come to expect?

The governor's budget people have said we will probably lose more than \$1.1 billion in state revenue in the next 18 months — which is the rest of the current biennium.

- Forty-four percent of that revenue was earmarked for transportation projects, including improvements for highways, the ferry system and mass-transit programs.
- Thirty-two percent was headed for local-transit agencies.
- Twenty-one percent was destined for police and fire departments and other criminal-justice duties in cities and counties.
- And three percent was intended for public-health services such as restaurant and day-care inspections.

Be assured: We will not support any plan to reimpose the property tax on motor vehicles! We



agree with the governor's commitment against any such idea.

Yes, we do have a surplus of more than \$1 billion. We will consider changing the law that currently prohibits using the surplus to make sure vital services are taken care of. The emergency reserve was put in place in case we ever get hit by another depression. **If the unthinkable happened, the idea is that we'd have the money to make sure people don't have to go through what so many families went through in the 1930s.**

We're looking at a loss of \$750 million a year in revenue; the surplus, if we did decide to use it, would be gone very quickly.

Keep in mind that about half the new state employees hired in recent years are college and university teachers. Paychecks for most of these people — nearly two-thirds — are funded with federal — not state — dollars. And almost 13 percent of the new state employees work in correctional facilities. **Tougher**

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anti-crime laws and stricter sentencing guidelines are putting more and more people behind bars — and keeping them there longer.

Stopping inefficiency

We will continue backing efforts at rooting out waste and inefficiency in government. That's a top priority. It should be remembered, though, that state government is very active in this arena! Governor Locke's Savings Incentive Program, for instance, has saved many millions of dollars in the last few years alone.

We also support his High-Performance Government proposal for, among other things, the contracting out of some state services as a way to save more money.

◆ **Personal privacy: A new federal law raises potentially scary possibilities**

Big changes in our country's financial laws loom ahead, thanks to passage of the federal Financial Services Act. The new law, which won bipartisan support in Congress, removes Depression-era barriers — and allows banks, stock brokers, and insurance companies to merge and sell each other's products.

Most observers agree that we have a tremendous right to medical-records privacy and to other aspects of our personal privacy — that we have a right not to have to worry about a company selling or giving information about us. The disagreement is the extent to which these rights are threatened by the new federal law.

Certainly, the privacy issue is far from over. A last-minute amendment to the Financial Services Act allows Washington and other states to write our own rules and regulations to protect personal privacy.

Our rights are limited

The law requires companies to display privacy policies — and gives consumers a right to "opt out" of information-sharing with some companies. But the right is very limited. Here's how:

- Merged companies are free to share personal information with any affiliate without the consumer's

consent, and without the consumer being able to opt out. A conglomerate's life-insurance division can alert the banking division's loan officers about a person's health problems.

- Corporations are free to share personal financial information with telemarketers and other outside companies without the consumer's permission (or ability to opt out) if the companies have joint-marketing agreements.
- Corporations can share personal financial records with outside companies for credit verification.

Perhaps you read a newspaper report last September about a very alarming story. **It seems that a California bank sold 3.7 million credit-card numbers to a convicted felon, who said he wanted the information for credit verification. The criminal is alleged to have rung up \$45 million in charges to card-holders. He's also alleged to have billed unknowing customers for access to X-rated Web sites.**

Representative Hatfield is serving on the attorney general's task force investigating our financial-privacy laws. Federal passage of the Financial Services Act will help lift consumer privacy to the top rank of legislative issues.

◆ **Gov't.-streamlining: State agencies should be our partners — not our adversaries**

The state-government bureaucracy confronting citizens, businesses and local governments should be streamlined and made more citizen-friendly, according to a plan we will continue supporting in the 2000 session.

Our legislation would require the Permit Assistance Center to better coordinate the process of permit-application review. The center would set up regional offices to make the process more convenient for citizens.

Any problems involving permit and lease applications would be discussed early in the permit process so applicants have time to respond and make necessary corrections and clarifications.



We believe that individuals, businesses and local governments shouldn't have to face a long wait when they submit an application to a state agency. It's imperative that we speed up the permit process as we continue preparing for challenges down the road. **Provisions in the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the federal Clean Water Act demonstrate that we do face difficult times ahead.**

Communities bit hard

With the ESA, our timber communities already know all about difficult times. And our fishing communities — which are often one and the same — are feeling a tremendous strain, too. The Clean Water Act is also hitting a lot of communities with many of our state's waterways listed as polluted.

We must make sure policies don't unfairly impact farm families in Southwest Washington and other parts of our state.

Bottom line: State agencies need to work toward the goal of coordinating their response to taxpayers. The goal is to speak with one voice in reviewing applications.

◆ **Retraining assistance: Providing an honest helping hand to honest working people**

OK. This is the part in our newsletter where we remind our friends from Seattle and its big suburbs that this is One Washington. We say this in every newsletter, we say it in most of our committee meetings, and we say it in a lot of our discussions on the floor of the House. We mean it.

One of our first duties this legislative session had better be bringing the Timber Retraining Benefits (TRB) program back to life. This very successful program was established a decade ago to provide retraining benefits for laid-off timber workers. A few years later, the TRB program was extended to help economically devastated fishermen.

Washington's working people who have been involved in the program — and those citizens who may be involved if it's resurrected — have earned a helping hand. The fishing industry is taking the same awful hit that the timber industry has been suffering for years.

We failed in the 1999 session to reach agreement to extend the program. But we will continue pushing in the 2000 session to bring the program back.

Extra unemployment benefits for displaced workers in timber and fishing communities — provided the workers are enrolled in retraining — are extended in the program. **It's a great way to get people back to work in good-paying, worthwhile careers.**



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◆ Education:

Stay the course in building strong schools for young people

We must keep working toward genuine education reform. **No school in Washington should have anything less than well-qualified teachers and other school staff.** And they must have the tools to get our kids the best possible learning experience — **and to get our citizens the best possible tax investment.**

Standards for all educators, especially beginning teachers, should be boosted so men and women are more encouraged to enter this important profession.

Did you know that class sizes here in Washington are about as large as any other state in the country? What this means is that, when kids in our state are in need of some individual attention from their teachers, they face a longer wait than most other kids in the nation! That's got to change.

Every bit as important, too, is our duty to stop violence and harassment in our schools — these are places for learning, after all, not for fear and terror.

◆ Secure families:

Let's keep on working for good jobs, strong businesses

Grandparents and parents and kids and everyone else in our state should have safe communities — communities where you'd be proud to put down your roots. Further, we need to establish meaningful property-tax relief.

To be sure, the phrase "good jobs" means as much today as ever. Let's make sure that businesses — businesses with good jobs for good families — stay committed to planting and maintaining roots of their own here. And we've got to continue high standards for adult education and training so that Washington workers are a good fit for Washington businesses.

Businesses and other citizens pay taxes for programs and services in government — and we all have a right to get our money's worth. We've got to take a look at policies that make state government an ally — not a



foe — for businesses and for other working families in our state.

Finally, we've got to balance our commitment to a healthy environment with our responsibility to families and businesses. The environmental challenges before us — ensuring oil-pipeline safety, for instance, as well as maintaining the safety and availability of our state parks — require a coordinated effort by citizens, businesses, and government.

You can be certain that we and other coastal legislators are keeping an especially close eye on the Department of Ecology (DOE). A closer than usual eye, you might say, so they don't try to ram new shoreline guidelines through the process like they did in 1999.

You'll recall that the department last spring issued a preliminary update of the guidelines — and then didn't even schedule sufficient time for citizens, businesses and local governments to comment on the proposal. Pressure from communities that really need economic development got the DOE to slow down, take a decent amount of public comment, and rewrite the draft recommendations so they aren't so onerous.

We'll also continue the discussion on cougars and bears. Some of us maintain that laws need to reflect a dangerous reality for many families — and not just for families who live near the woods, either. Other lawmakers balk at what we believe are pretty reasonable ideas for keeping our kids — not to mention ourselves — safe.

◆ Unwanted solicitations:

You have options if you don't want to be pestered

The attorney general's office provided us with this information about what you can do to stop being bothered by unwanted sales promotions and catalogs and the like.

To free yourself from unwanted telephone solicitation calls, write to:

***Telephone Preference Service
Direct Marketing Association
PO Box 9014
Farmingdale, NY 11735-4274***

To free yourself from unwanted mail solicitations, write to:

***Mail Preference Service
Direct Marketing Association
PO Box 9008
Farmingdale, NY 11735-9008***

These services will notify marketers affiliated with this consumer-service program to delete your name and address or telephone number from its lists. Since not all direct-mail companies or telephone solicitors are affiliated with this service, you may need to write directly to the particular company and ask that your name be removed from any lists rented or sold to other users.

What if you receive pornographic material? The attorney general says to take it to your local post office to make sure you don't receive any more such things.

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